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TIGHTENING THE SCREWS: RESTORING SECURITY IN COLOMBIA

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TIGHTENING THE SCREWS: RESTORING SECURITY IN COLOMBIA

In today's international environment, with Palestine, Iraq, and North Korea dominating the headlines, does Colombia really matter? According to the recently published National Security Strategy of the United States of America, the Bush Administration certainly thinks so¹:

In Colombia, we recognize the link between the terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups. We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provid[ing] basic security to the Colombian people. (10)

With these words, the Bush Administration reaffirms Colombia's importance in its Latin American policy, and highlights the country's central position in the "wars" on drugs and terrorism. As the source for 80 percent of the cocaine imported into the U.S., and a nation in conflict with American-designated terrorist groups, Colombia represents a convergence of major American interests. Equally important, Colombia is a democracy—albeit weak—effecting orderly transitions of power throughout most of its history.

Colombians returned to the polls in May 2002, electing as their president Alvaro Uribe Velez, a Liberal Party dissident whose "hard right" campaign promised to defeat the insurgent threat and restore government control of the country. Dr. Uribe is on the right course: His plan to restore security is an essential first step to ensure the state's continued viability. Colombians agree, electing Dr. Uribe with an "unprecedented" first-round majority (Sweig). Now Colombia needs to remain on course, with an effective military strategy that defeats internal threats, and social and economic programs that enhance prospects for long-term stability. The United States should support the Colombian military through extensive training and military aid, using its influence—and limited participation—to ensure an effective army strategy consistent with liberal democratic

¹ Subsequent references will be shortened to National Security Strategy.

values. In addition, the U.S. should apply all available political, diplomatic, and economic tools to assist Colombian efforts toward a just, inclusive democracy and a viable market economy.

POLITICAL SETTING AND OBJECTIVES

Interests: U.S. interests in Colombia and Latin America include: A peaceful, democratic, prosperous Colombia with strengthened government institutions; a stable, coca-free region of liberal democratic states with viable free-market economies; and active regional institutions with effective mechanisms for dispute resolution. Obviously, Colombia's central position, internal conflict, and narcotics issues make the country a centerpiece of U.S. interests in Latin America.

Discussion: To gain a sense of Colombia's importance to U.S. policy, one need only look at a map. As the gateway to South America, Colombia's fate affects Central America, northern South America, and the Caribbean, and the nation has a profound influence on U.S. political and economic interests as well. Colombia is the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, provides some 80 percent of the cocaine entering the U.S., and is possibly the source of the second largest group of illegal aliens in the U.S. (Sweig; Marcella, 7; Passage, 4). The nation is also the U.S.'s fifth-largest trading partner in Latin America, with annual two-way trade exceeding \$10 billion (Marcella, 6). Obviously, America has a stake in Colombia, but effective strategy requires more than recognition of interests; it requires an understanding of the country's key components as well.

Colombia has been described as a "nonrepresentative democracy," procedurally democratic but with insufficient checks and balances and a lack of true representation (Nunez, 6). Leaders of Colombia's two parties have developed—and been enmeshed in—networks of influence that favor the country's dominant economic elites. Their focus, therefore, has traditionally been on the state's major cities, with a concomitant neglect of the rural areas (Aviles, 32). Consequently, the government "lacks state apparatus or effective institutions outside the principal cities," crippling its ability to provide security and governance in most regions (Sweig).

Colombia's capitalist economy is an enigmatic mix of legitimate free-market activities and market-distorting narcotrafficking. The country's powerful economic actors have historically been connected to important exports such as coffee, but a new group of capitalists, connected to the cocaine and marijuana trades, surfaced in the 1980s (Aviles, 36). These "narco-entrepreneurs" invested their profits in construction, other industry, and—most importantly—land. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, drug lords purchased vast farm tracts and cattle ranches from Colombia's landed elite, in a "counter land reform" that placed over 5 million hectares, more than half of Colombia's most productive land, in the hands of drug traffickers (Aviles, 37; Sweig).

The country's current economic picture is grim. The economy grew just 1.6 percent in 2001, well below the five percent growth rate needed to substantially decrease poverty levels and unemployment—currently running at 64 percent and 20 percent of the population respectively (Johnson; Carrigan; Aviles, 37). Economic activity is hampered by the intense concentration of income—the wealthiest 20 percent receive 55 percent of the national income, compared to 17 percent of the income for the poorest 50 percent (Aviles, 37). Moreover, Colombia's central bank has held to a tight monetary policy in order to keep inflation in check; the current 5.6 percent inflation rate is the lowest in a decade but has come at the cost of economic growth (Johnson).

Governance shortcomings and economic troubles exacerbate Colombia's most serious issue, its continuing conflict with leftist rebels and rightist paramilitary forces. The impact to the country has been severe: Colombia is now the world's homicide capital, averaging 3,500 killings and 3,250 kidnappings per year, and has the third-highest number of internal refugees in the world (Sweig). Security outside the major cities has been severely weakened—and is nonexistent in many rural areas. Some 200 municipalities—of over 1,000 nationwide—no longer have any police presence at all (Marcella, 4). Remarkably, despite its shallow civil apparatus, economic difficulties, and ongoing conflict, Colombia has successfully continued a competitive election

process and retains civil control over the armed forces—the country even broadened democracy with a new constitution in 1991 (Aviles, 31). Colombian voters used the electoral process to express their weariness and frustration with the ongoing conflict, electing Alvaro Uribe Velez as president on the basis of a “hard right” platform promising to restore security (Forero).

Immediately after his election, Dr. Uribe outlined his objectives for Colombia: restoration of security throughout the country, eradication of coca cultivation, revitalization of the economy, and social reform. The president is, however, obviously mindful of his mandate—the Colombian people overwhelmingly elected him based on his number one objective, restoration of security in Colombia (Graham). As the National Security Strategy suggests, Dr. Uribe’s national objectives are consonant with America’s regional objectives, which seek “a truly democratic hemisphere” and the elimination of threats that “imperil the health and security of the United States” (10).

Accordingly, former Ambassador David Passage frames the key U.S. objectives as:

[A] cohesive and democratic Colombia led by a freely-elected government...able to exercise effective control over its national territory, safeguard the human rights and civil liberties of all its citizens...supported by all its citizens as it tackles the country’s serious political, social and economic problems. (7)

MILITARY STRATEGIC SETTING

Constraints and Opportunities: Lack of security constrains Colombian governance and U.S. aid; thus, first steps should be focused on defeating the military threat. The country’s sovereign, democratic character also constrains U.S. policy somewhat, because U.S. actions must be viewed as supporting—not interfering with—a duly elected government that recognizes its obligations to the electorate.

Dr. Uribe’s aggressive approach to Colombia’s security problems creates an opportunity for the U.S. to protect regional stability and remove a substantial source of narcotics. In addition, the “war on terrorism” helps justify the application of additional resources in Colombia, since three U.S.-designated terrorist organizations operate in the country. Congress is also now willing to

define Colombia within the context of a counterinsurgency campaign rather than remaining confined to a counternarcotics operation, increasing the flexibility of U.S. strategy (Hess). Finally, regional instability actually creates an opportunity for leadership in the region and a chance to implement the National Security Strategy in a manner that reassures the international community.

Discussion: Colombia's conflict has been described within the frameworks of counterinsurgency, counternarcotics, and—in the wake of last year's terrorist attacks in the U.S.—counterterrorism. Each of these descriptors contains elements of truth: The two leftist guerrilla organizations espouse Marxist-Leninist ideology and claim to seek land reform and wealth distribution; the insurgent groups and the paramilitary forces are involved in narcotrafficking to some degree; and the U.S. has designated both insurgent groups and paramilitary forces as terrorist organizations (State Dept).

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), with approximately 15,000 guerrillas, is a highly decentralized network with separate, geographically dispersed "fronts," each with its own "business plan" (McLean). Although claiming to pursue a Maoist model of insurgency, the group in fact devotes little effort toward mobilizing the populace and is supported by only two percent of the Colombian population. The guerrillas have been widely condemned for campaigns of assassination, kidnapping, extortion, indiscriminate civilian attacks, and forced recruitment of over 6,000 child soldiers (Marcella, 2). The character of the present organization suggests that the FARC's original ideology has been subverted through its extensive involvement with narcotics. Beginning in the 1980s, the fronts funded their operations by protecting drug caravans. Since then, the FARC has become involved in every step of the narcotics supply chain, with a \$500 million annual estimated income and a character that appears to be evolving from an ideological movement into a militant criminal enterprise (Nunez, 8).

Operating in southern Colombia, the National Liberation Army (ELN) has remained closer to its Marxist-Leninist roots. Comprising approximately 5,000 guerrillas, the organization funds its

activities through kidnappings, bank robberies, security for narcotics traffickers, and pipeline royalties from the Colombian-Occidental pipeline in Arauca (diverted from the local government). In 2001, FARC and ELN conflict over oil royalties resulted in over 170 pipeline bombings and cost the government \$500 million—approximately 2 percent of Colombia’s national GDP (Miller).

Arrayed against the leftist guerrillas, right wing paramilitary forces also have a large presence in Colombia. The weak central government’s inability to provide a minimum level of security has created a long paramilitary tradition, with landowners and ranchers financing privately armed forces to provide security in areas where the Colombian army can’t maintain a presence (Aviles, 43). The paramilitaries enjoy an element of populist support, stemming from frustration with the government’s inability to protect the populace from the left-wing insurgents (Graham). The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) acts as an umbrella organization for several smaller groups and seeks recognition as a legitimate political presence in the country—a goal complicated by the group’s dismal human rights record: In 1998, AUC was cited by human rights organizations as responsible for 75-80 percent of the human rights abuses in the country (Nunez 6). Right wing forces do have a history in counterdrug efforts; for example, previous Colombian administrations had “no qualms about working with groups responsible for widespread massacres ...as long as they supported the war with the Medellin cartel” (Aviles, 44).

The paramilitaries initially funded their operations through “monthly fees,” paid by wealthy Colombians for protection from the leftist guerrillas (Wilson). In an ironic twist, however, right wing forces have now been seduced by the profits available in the cocaine trade, a major source of funding that has allowed the AUC to triple its membership (to 15,000 guerrillas) in the last 3 years. The paramilitaries are thus caught in a paradox—seeking legitimacy in the political process but tied to the drug trade lest the FARC achieve a military advantage through its own drug profits. The drug issue has fractured the AUC, leaving the two largest coca-producing regions—Bolívar and

Putumayo provinces—in the hands of paramilitary commanders unwilling to give up narcotics as a source of income (Wilson).

MILITARY OBJECTIVES

The Colombian security forces' primary objective is to regain control of the country, which entails defeat of all insurgent groups and establishment of effective and legitimate public security throughout Colombia. Once achieved, rural security will lay the foundation for the rest of the Uribe administration's political efforts; it will also protect aid workers and administrators from insurgent threats, currently a significant constraint on U.S. social and economic assistance.

Although a negotiated settlement might also remove the threat:

The principal lesson learned in successful modern counterinsurgencies...is that the battlefield must be linked to the peace process. A real peace process ending in conflict termination is only possible when the armed forces of the government establish enough asymmetry on the battlefield to convince the insurgents that further war is counterproductive to their physical and political survival (Marcella, 5).

In other words, Colombia's insurgency requires an integrated solution, but military success is critical to attainment of key political objectives in the quest for long-term peace.

Insurgent objectives are less clear, and appear to have been subverted by the groups' involvement with narcotics trafficking. Rhetoric notwithstanding, the guerrillas' greatest strength lies in the tremendous source of funds and arms available through the narcotics trade, allowing them to pay their soldiers a salary three times the minimum wage (Graham). Although the corruption of narcotics has complicated the identification of valid insurgent objectives, one key factor is evident: Continued guerrilla operations depend on a lack of security in the countryside. In fact, both left and right wing forces depend on the absence of security forces in order to preserve their freedom of operation. For example, the FARC recently began a campaign of death threats and ultimatums, aimed at driving elected mayors and municipal judges out of office. Within only a few weeks, the guerrillas managed to erase "all traces of government authority from 35 municipalities

in 24 of the nation's 32 states.” In theory, the rebels seek to impose alternative local governments, based on the formation of “revolutionary command councils,” but the practical result has been absence of authority, leaving the rebels free to continue their narcotics involvement (Carrigan).

The AUC appears to have a similar objective. Although the organization is now split into pro-drug and anti-drug factions, both are—obviously—most powerful when the army is absent. Unlike the leftists, however, the right wing forces are also seeking to ally with government forces against the rebels, in a bid to legitimize their role in the country (Wilson). Even the Bolivar Bloc—the AUC splinter group that refuses to sever its ties to the drug trade—has made overtures to the central government, supporting coca eradication efforts in one area under its control, in part to make the region less attractive to leftist rebels but mostly to improve its image (Miller).

None of the opposing forces relies on the personality of a key leader for its continued success—“silver bullets” won’t eliminate the movements. The FARC’s octogenarian ideologues are slowly giving way to younger leaders, whose primary goal is “finding ways to make money” (McLean). The group’s organization into fronts contributes to the dispersion of power, with regional commanders enjoying broad operational latitude. In comparison, the AUC’s most powerful leader, Carlos Castano, has been a driving, unifying force in the past, but he faces extradition to the U.S. on drug charges—and was unable to prevent the organization’s fracture into regional entities when disagreements arose over narcotics trafficking (Wilson).

Under such dispersed organizational structures, key leaders constitute regional centers of gravity. The killing or capture of any individual leader won’t paralyze opposing forces, but cumulative losses in the leadership ranks will degrade operational effectiveness over time. Operations intended to capture or kill opposing leaders are therefore an appropriate component of the Colombian army’s strategy. In addition, the insurgents’ failure to mobilize the population, and

the subversion of their political objectives to narcotics activities, point to two additional centers of gravity for all three opponents: the soldiers themselves and the narcotics trade.

Evidence suggests that the majority of guerrilla and paramilitary recruits are impoverished, functionally illiterate teenagers, frequently pressed into service at gunpoint and possessing little real allegiance to the leftist cause. Moreover, many of the FARC's more recent recruits joined the organization at a time when it enjoyed the "sanctuary" of an army-free zone provided by the government as a "good faith" prelude to negotiations. The commitment of these soldiers in the face of increased military pressure is suspect. In fact, guerrilla defectors are a significant source of recruits for the paramilitary forces (Guillermoprieto).

Drug activity forms the single largest source of income for the FARC, and probably for the AUC as well. As the army eradicates opposing presence in the rural areas, it will be able to isolate the guerillas and paramilitaries from their narcotics activities. Recent operations in Barrancominas have potentially "wiped out the single biggest source of income for the FARC—perhaps as much as \$100 million" of the group's annual revenue (Miller, T.) Income loss will inevitably degrade operational capability, increasing opposing forces' vulnerability to increased army pressure.

With significant military pressure against the guerilla and paramilitary forces, both to restrict their freedom of action and to isolate them from their primary funding sources, Colombian forces can complete the restoration of security and functioning government in the rural areas. While operating, however, the army has to protect its own centers of gravity: key U.S. assistance and—as in any democracy—the support of the Colombian people.

MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

Colombia's army has "taken the lead in the national response to the decades-old insurgency." (Marcella 4) Beset in the past by organizational difficulties, human rights abuses, and inept execution, the army has made great strides in its "strength and performance...under

tremendous pressure,” and has successfully transformed to meet insurgent efforts (Marcella 4). Despite these improvements, the army—with 145,000 military personnel, only 30,000 of whom are professional soldiers—lacks the manpower for a “persisting strategy,” which would seek out and engage insurgents while securing key infrastructure (Marcella, 4). For example, when Colombian forces in Arauca were diverted to guard the oil pipeline against further guerrilla attacks, they succeeded (only 29 attacks this year), but had to “uncover” significant areas of the province. Provincial violence exploded, and homicides are expected to more than double this year (Miller).

The 87,000-member National Police Corps has proven inadequate as the civil arm of the country’s security efforts. Lacking an effective coordination apparatus, police efforts have been sporadic at best. Moreover, guerrilla forces have eradicated police presence in many areas, with some 200 municipalities (roughly one-fifth of the nation’s total) lacking any presence at all (Marcella, 4). The police corps has also seen its share of corruption and human rights abuses, although a “zero tolerance” policy, directed against police and military collusion with paramilitary forces, has proven very effective. Since September 2000, more than 600 members of the armed forces and police have been dismissed because of right-wing collusion (Marcella, 5).

Overall, Colombia’s forces are insufficient to meet the insurgent threat. Experts suggest a 10-to-1 advantage is needed for the armed forces to prevail, in order to allow simultaneous operations against insurgents and narcotraffickers, adequate defense of infrastructure and communications, and better presence nationwide (Marcella, 4). The 35,000 guerrillas and paramilitaries would therefore require tripling the size of Colombia’s army (Marcella, 4).

STRATEGIC CONCEPT—MILITARY AND POLITICAL

Ways and Means: U.S. policy in Colombia will have to comprise a multitude of initiatives across the foreign policy spectrum, primarily through military assistance to help restore internal security,

and diplomatic efforts to encourage long-term reform.² The key tools for implementation consist of military aid and training, foreign aid (including financing and development assistance), and enhanced trade relations and economic support. American diplomacy can also help contain the conflict and prevent regional destabilization.

Discussion—Military Means: President Uribe has set in motion a comprehensive strategy to improve the army and police through additional resources and training, and to mobilize the population through use of informants and militias. Colombia's 2001 military budget was \$3.256 billion, a mere 3.5 percent of the country's GDP and insufficient for the army's counterinsurgency efforts (Aviles, 5). To fund security forces expansion, Dr. Uribe recently announced a 1.2 percent tax on citizens and corporations worth more than \$60,000. The additional \$800 million in revenue will add 30,000 professional soldiers and increase total security forces personnel from less than 230,000 to approximately 400,000 during the current presidential term (Ortiz).

Dr. Uribe has also established a citizens' informant network throughout the country, declaring an eventual goal of one million paid informants to provide intelligence for the army and police. Early indications for the fledgling program are encouraging: The recruitment of approximately 850 informants in Valledupar has led to a 43 percent decrease in local highway robberies, and only one kidnapping, in the last year. Despite the early success, the strategy does entail certain risks: Informants could be considered as "legitimate" military targets, they could provide false information as a means of vengeance against personal enemies, and the networks

² Government attempts to eradicate narcotics activities in Colombia are tied closely to both social and economic initiatives, especially with respect to crop substitution programs and aerial spraying. However, the antidrug effort has too many other facets, including demand reduction (especially in America) and civil law enforcement programs in other countries, to be adequately addressed within the scope of this discussion. Nonetheless, three points are pertinent. First, as guerilla and paramilitary presence is reduced, other criminal elements can reasonably be expected to fill the "vacuum" in the narcotics trade; the enlarged security forces should be adequate to address this problem if it occurs. Second, rural reform has to address the myriad issues associated with crop substitution, including infrastructure development and incentivizing structures based on a realistic timetable for subsidy withdrawals. Finally, counternarcotics strategy must be closely linked with the political and military strategies outlined in this paper.

could be penetrated by armed groups or common criminals. Most importantly, the rebels will adapt over time. In Valledupar, for example, the rebels have begun to counter the informant network by traveling in civilian clothes and erecting roadblocks for a very short time before moving to a new location (“Informer Network”). Thus, the informant network can be a useful tool, but its primary role should be to augment an effective, professional intelligence network.

Dr. Uribe plans to reform Colombia’s six separate intelligence services and create a National Intelligence Center (CENIT) that reports directly to him. CENIT will hopefully eliminate stovepipes; better coordinate intelligence efforts, improve analysis based on a more comprehensive intelligence picture, and develop independent operations (Ortiz). The success of these reforms will be key to Colombia’s success in its counterinsurgency efforts.

In an attempt to involve the entire country in the war against the guerrillas, Dr. Uribe plans to create territorial defense contingents—citizen militias—to hold territory wrested by the army from leftist and paramilitary forces. With an initial target of 15,000 “peasant soldiers,” and a future goal of 100,000 citizens, the government envisions a community-level constabulary force answering to national military authority, able to defend localities against guerrilla attacks while waiting for support from an army rapid-reaction force (Ortiz). Trained in weapons handling, tactical unit operations, and military drill, the militias could help reduce the insurgents’ freedom of maneuver. There are risks, however: Participants would become legitimate targets; arming the population adds weapons to already well-armed regions; and the militias would have to be carefully managed, in order to prevent their “morphing” into yet another faction in the armed struggle (Hess). Despite the risks, history suggests that counterinsurgency efforts have enjoyed success when government-supported militias helped to maintain local security (Marcella 9).

Taken together, Dr. Uribe’s initiatives constitute a comprehensive, aggressive effort to reestablish security throughout Colombia. As the National Security Strategy foreshadows, U.S. aid

is a key component of the Colombian military strategy. American assistance in recent years has been packaged under the aegis of “counternarcotics,” with aid restricted solely to antidrug efforts. Under Plan Colombia, a \$7.5 billion Colombian initiative funded primarily by Colombia (\$4 billion), but with assistance from the international community (\$3.5 billion) and the U.S. (\$1.3 billion), the Clinton administration provided helicopters, intelligence, and other military assistance, including U.S. Special Forces training for three new counternarcotics battalions as a pilot project for building a new, professional Colombian army (Sweig). Unfortunately, the restriction to counterdrug efforts limited the overall effectiveness of American aid. The Bush administration recently changed the policy, however. A July 2002 memorandum, signed by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, allowed all future aid to Colombia to be used for “any activity that fights terrorism” (Hess). With Congress’ support, the U.S.’s new policy provides an opportunity for a more flexible approach toward helping Colombia defeat its internal enemies.

The U.S. military should first aid Colombia with a foundation of military equipment and advice, including guidance for counterinsurgency plans, conduct of joint operations, and effective logistics management (Marcella, 10). American intelligence support is also critical. In 2001, U.S. intelligence was crucial to the previously mentioned Barrancominas campaign. With U.S. intelligence on rebel encampments, drug processing locations, and radio communications intercepts, Colombian forces shattered an extensive FARC drug operation and freed the region from guerrilla control (Miller). Intelligence support should continue, and U.S. experts should help with Colombian reform as well.

In addition, American Special Forces advisors should greatly expand their training programs, helping the Colombian army dramatically improve its capability in small and large unit tactics, night operations, quick reaction operations, and management of usable operational intelligence (Sweig; Passage 14-15). Special Forces training will become particularly important as

the Colombian army rapidly expands—close coordination with U.S. military advisors is critical to the effective use of the additional forces. Ultimately, the goal should be an adaptive force structure able to transition between main force and small unit operations, not only to respond to insurgent adaptations but also to shape and dominate the conflict across the military spectrum.

The State Department's designation of the FARC, ELN, and AUC as terrorist organizations creates a legitimate opportunity for American military personnel to play an increased role in Colombia, consonant with the National Security Strategy's promise of "direct and continuous action using all the elements of national and international power" against terrorists (6). The character and extent of increased American involvement face widespread discussion and debate in the coming months, but direct, large-scale military intervention is neither necessary nor desirable: Although the government is weak, Colombia is a sovereign nation and should be encouraged to continue its independent efforts toward resolution of the armed conflict. Moreover, the Colombian people continue to be "dead set" against outside powers asserting military authority in their country (Nunez, 13-16). With that in mind, limited American military participation makes sense.

Special Forces advisors should accompany Colombian forces on military operations, both to assess and maximize the effectiveness of their training, and to demonstrate U.S. commitment to Colombia's cause. El Salvador provides a viable model for American participation. During the guerrilla war in the 1980s, Special Forces advisors trained and "fought alongside" their Salvadoran army counterparts (Terzian). Advisors were restricted to patrolling within certain distances of their camps; nevertheless, they frequently engaged in ambushes and firefights while on patrol. Close involvement and shared hardships created an atmosphere of "rapport and credibility" between the advisors and Salvadoran soldiers and greatly enhanced the advisors' effectiveness (Terzian).

In addition to the advisors, the U.S. should consider providing helicopter pilots as well, especially special operations-capable pilots to enhance the army's night insertion capability while

the Colombian army continues to expand its indigenous crew force. Ultimately, the U.S. should even consider committing AC-130 gunships to the conflict, as a valuable source of close air support for army operations. These steps admittedly represent incremental escalation in the U.S.'s military role, but they also disproportionately increase the chances of success and are consistent with American objectives and policy outlined in the National Security Strategy.

Obviously, Vietnam's "ghost" overshadows increased military involvement, but Colombia has few parallels with Southeast Asia. First, Colombia is a functional democracy, unlike Saigon's autocratic regimes. Also, compared to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the Colombian army possesses greater technical and professional competence at the senior and middle leadership levels and has been able to adapt its methods and techniques in response to insurgent force adaptations. The most fundamental difference, however, rests within the context of U.S.-Colombian roles and responsibilities. U.S. military assistance constitutes a subset of the total Colombian effort, with the means matched to the overall policy and coordinated more closely with Congressional oversight.

To summarize the military strategy, Colombian security forces will grow in size and capability, and—with U.S. training, military aid, and intelligence support—aggressively engage insurgent and paramilitary forces. Taking advantage of superior mobility and firepower, they can engage and defeat enemy forces, either through opportune contact arising from aggressive patrolling, special forces' operations to disrupt guerilla networks, or larger scale operations against known enemy concentrations (similar to the Barrancominas campaign.) As enemy forces are driven out of the provinces, regular army units, supplemented by citizen militias and rapid-reaction forces, will maintain security, allowing restoration of local government, constabulary services, and assistance programs.

Discussion—Political Means: The focus thus far has been on the military instrument, since it lays the foundation for the rest of the strategy. A militaristic "solution" is untenable, however, because

it leaves intact the social and economic conditions that have fanned conflict for over 40 years. As early as 1958, a CIA team recommended that Colombia “strengthen its judiciary, implement significant land reform, and eliminate the rural guerrilla insurgency.” Otherwise, Colombia risked “genocide or chaos.” In the end, the Colombian government implemented only the security-related recommendations, continuing the “gross inequality and culture of violence” in Colombia (Sweig). Encouragingly, Dr. Uribe’s plan contains major elements of social and economic reform. Although he declared a “national state of emergency,” restricting citizens’ groups and media for 180 days and authorizing detention without warrants, he also pledged to end political cronyism, streamline bureaucracy, reduce central government, and use savings to pay for social reform (Graham).

To succeed, Dr. Uribe will have to address the country’s flawed political process, which has historically bestowed disproportionate power on the economic elites. Coupled with the absence of security outside the major cities, local government through much of Colombia has fallen prey to high levels of corruption, interfering with provision of basic services and diverting local funds to insurgent forces. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department can play a key role in the establishment of transparent, accountable municipal governments that better meet the needs of the rural populace. USAID initiatives in Putumayo and Caqueto provinces—aimed at transparent financial management, stronger municipal structures, and greater public participation—constitute positive first steps (“USAID”). The U.S. should also help strengthen education, health and sanitation, communications, and economic development services, enabling equal access for all citizens (Marcella 9). As Colombia regains security in individual provinces, these programs should be quickly established to address underlying social issues.

Judiciary reform is another key element of Colombia’s social programs. The country’s judiciary is weak and corrupt, a victim of an organized assault initiated by the drug mafias and continued by the guerrillas and paramilitaries. Indeed, for a time, Colombia lacked a working

prosecutorial system. Even now, over 95 percent of crimes are never prosecuted, with only 3 percent of active criminal investigations leading to prosecutorial action (McLean). A core of honest judiciary officials exists, but their effectiveness requires the existence of regional security.

The U.S. is, and should continue to be, a key partner in judicial reform. USAID is already helping the judicial system move toward a transparent accusatorial system, an effort that should increase confidence in the nation's legal apparatus. USAID has also sponsored establishment of rural "Justice Houses" to increase access to legal services. (McLean).

The most effective social reform—and the most difficult to implement—is in land ownership. Asset forfeiture laws, passed by the government of former President Ernesto Samper, provide a possible solution: The government could seize millions of acres in fertile agricultural lands from drug lords who purchased the land in recent years. Hence, Dr. Uribe could implement a significant land reform package, either as an independent initiative or a source of leverage during future negotiations to eliminate narcotics presence in the country (Sweig). Land reform initiatives will be difficult until the country stabilizes, but the potential benefits make the subject worthy of consideration as another tool for social and economic reform.

The State Department should remain engaged with the Uribe administration at all levels of government, encouraging a balance between increased security demands and continued political transparency. Dr. Uribe's actions thus far are encouraging. Facing Colombian Congressional resistance to his austerity plan, he has indicated a willingness to go directly to the Colombian people for a national referendum, and he has appointed his Justice and Interior Minister as a "heavyweight lobbyist" in Congress, actions which indicate a commitment to the democratic process (Stewart). The U.S. Ambassador to Colombia (Hon. Anne Patterson) should support these actions as consistent with democratic ideals, a complementary approach to her recent emphasis on military aspects of U.S. aid (Johnson).

Combined with social reform and political transparency, economic initiatives are vital to long-term stability in Colombia. In the short term, to help the economy grow, Colombia's new finance minister, Roberto Junguito, plans to institute a series of austerity measures and restructuring in order to free funds for social welfare spending. Focusing on the construction sector as a vehicle for economic growth, the Colombian government plans a significant program for low-income public housing, with spending rates that will hopefully lead to jobs creation and help revitalize the economy (Johnson). In addition, Mr. Junguito is considering relaxation of the tight monetary controls currently imposed by the country's central bank, encouraging growth while keeping inflation in check (Johnson).

The U.S. has already taken specific steps to support Colombia economically, including renewal and expansion of the Andean Trade Preference Act, which increased the list of duty-free goods Colombia can export to the U.S. (Palmer). American support also helped Colombia secure \$2 billion in new loans from the Inter-American Development Bank (Sobieraj). U.S. backing is particularly critical in light of Moody's recent downgrade of Colombian debt instruments, a decision that raises the cost of future credit to Colombia. Ironically, World Bank actions to ease Argentinian loan repayment—and not Colombia's financial position itself—triggered Moody's downgrade ("Moody's"). Given Colombia's outstanding record of debt repayment, the U.S. should support the country in its pursuit of a \$3 billion World Bank loan and a stand-by credit line from the International Monetary Fund. With U.S. help, Colombia can progress economically while restoring internal security.

As the Colombian Army intensifies operations—and achieves greater success—the conflict threatens to broaden beyond Colombia's borders. Already, Colombia's war affects the Andean and Amazonian region, through the spread of coca cultivation, weapons smuggling, refugees, kidnapping, assassinations, and general lawlessness in the border regions (Sweig). Tensions

between Colombia and the leftist Venezuelan government have been exacerbated; Panama—which has no army—has both FARC and AUC presence in its Darien jungle; Ecuador has encountered cross-border skirmishes between FARC elements and Colombian and Ecuadoran armies; and Peru faces a threat to its recent success in coca eradication (Sweig). Although a concern, the potential “internationalization” of the conflict can actually be viewed as an opportunity for American leadership at the regional level, putting into practice the National Security Strategy’s promise to “work with friends and partners to alleviate suffering and restore stability” (9).

American efforts should be both bilateral and multilateral. For example, the U.S. can take advantage of the recent thaw in U.S.-Venezuelan relations to secure an agreement that closes the Venezuelan border to Colombian insurgents and paramilitary forces (Gunson and Tamayo). Working through the Organization of American States, the U.S. can also assemble a cooperative effort among armed forces in the region in order to contain the conflict within Colombian borders. In Panama—although past history acts as a constraint against American activity in the country, the U.S. could broker UN involvement to assist the Panamanian government. At a minimum, UN monitors could be stationed in Panama’s Darien jungle region, and a peacekeeping force could eventually be established if necessary. Using these initiatives, proactive American leadership can minimize the conflict’s spread.

In summary, the non-military political strategy applies a variety of tools to help Colombia address significant political, social, and economic issues. Using close diplomatic engagement, development assistance, trade expansion, and economic aid, the U.S. can support Colombian reform and development while also ensuring preservation of the country’s democratic process.

POTENTIAL RESULTS

Militarily, the Colombian strategy is unlikely to “wipe out” all elements of the leftist rebels and right wing paramilitary forces. Instead, with U.S. assistance, the army should ultimately create

enough pressure on the insurgent forces, both rebels and paramilitaries, to force them into serious negotiation. Dr. Uribe has asked for United Nations participation in any future talks, but he has also substantially narrowed the negotiating agenda to disarmament and reintegration of the rebels into Colombian society. Unless Dr. Uribe agrees to place social and political reforms back on the table, the FARC will refuse to negotiate. The leftist rebels will also object to any negotiations that include paramilitary forces (Sweig). Obviously, the complexity and contentious nature of any negotiations requires a military “incentive” before talks can begin, a condition likely to be created with the strategy proposed in this paper.

Politically, Colombia is likely to continue as a functioning democracy, but reforms are necessary for greater and longer-term political stability. The U.S. is in a strong position to influence Colombian reform efforts, because the government is dependent on the American instruments of trade, aid, and support for international finance agreements. These instruments will play a large role in Colombia’s continued economic viability.

Overall, the strategy does entail certain risks. As the U.S. becomes increasingly involved militarily, the potential for American casualties increases, as does the potential for Colombian fears of an American “invasion.” Accordingly, the Bush administration would be well served by a public diplomacy campaign—with both regional and domestic components, and in coordination with the Colombian government—that explains U.S. interests and objectives in Colombia, and frames U.S. strategy within the context of the overarching National Security Strategy. The message should very clearly identify the conflict as a Colombian problem—requiring a Colombian solution—but one that clearly affects American interests and is worth U.S. involvement.

Other risks—human rights abuses by Colombian security forces or undue restrictions on civil liberties by the Uribe government—could taint America’s reputation through its close association with the country. American military advisors help minimize the risks of human rights

violations—Special Forces advisors recently helped train a Colombian Army counternarcotics brigade that enjoys a “spotless” human rights record. In addition, extensive diplomatic contact at the ambassadorial level can clearly communicate the Bush Administration’s policy regarding the “nonnegotiable demands of human dignity” (Bush 3).

Finally, if the Colombian army appears to be regaining control of the countryside, its opponents will more than likely move into the cities, engaging in terrorism and attempting a transition to urban warfare in order to erode the Uribe government’s political base. Already, rebels rocketed the presidential palace during Dr. Uribe’s inauguration and have bombed over 170 power pylons to weaken the country’s energy network—a clear signal of their willingness to carry fight into the cities (Graham). Urban warfare poses great risks for insurgent forces, and it does little for the rebels’ ability to protect their sources of revenue, but the government’s credibility requires that it deal capably with this threat, using aggressive intelligence collection and rapid police response.

In conclusion, the Colombian government has initiated a course of action that should restore security in the country. Dr. Uribe’s strategy will fail, however, unless he follows through on his promises to address the social and economic disparities plaguing Colombia today. The United States clearly has interests tied to Colombia’s stability and should use the military, political, and economic instruments at its disposal to help ensure the nation’s future viability. With American equipment and training, Colombia can gain the upper hand against its internal opponents and force serious negotiations that integrate all elements back into society. With American encouragement and guidance, Colombia can also embark on a program of social reform that ensures all citizens enjoy the rights and benefits of Colombian citizenship. The future is clear: A stable, secure, democratic Colombia is in American’s best interests, and with American help, the future can move from the possible to the probable.

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